

**What Made the Good Samaritan Good?**

**Awakening To Life’s Brutal Realities**

**Leader’s Guide**

**Introduction**

Almost everyone knows what a Good Samaritan is—someone who helps those in need, especially strangers. But in Jesus’ day, it was a contradiction in terms. Samaritans were half-breeds, heretics, and enemies. To the Jews, a Samaritan was more likely to be the villain than the hero. So, why did Jesus make a Samaritan the role model in one of his most famous parables? And not just any parable, but one that answers perhaps the most important question we can ask: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus packs so much simple truth into his short stories that are as applicable today as when they were first told and written down. As in our first book, *Birth, not Behavior: A Fresh Look at the Prodigal Son*, we use our imagination to bring the parable to life for modern readers. We’ll introduce you to Simeon the Scribe, an expert in the law who comes to Jesus with the question we all ask at some point. You’ll meet Ephraim, a merchant from Samaria, and see what we think made him respond to a crisis like he did.

The title of this book asks: What Made the Good Samaritan Good? The answer is in the subtitle: Awakening To Life’s Brutal Realities. We’ll deal with four of these realities and show how to turn them from stumbling blocks into stepping stones.

This book can be studied in four sessions of 50-60 minutes each. There is an Optional Discussion time of up to 30 minutes for sessions that can go 90 minutes. There are time suggestions for each section and handouts for each session. Leaders should read and be familiar with the material before leading the sessions.

**Important:** Ensure participants have the book beforehand and encourage them to read the assigned chapters to get the most out of each session, including the Introduction and first two chapters before session 1.

We hope participants in these sessions will get as much insight and encouragement from studying this book as we did in writing it.

Mike Haddorff Mike Hamel

**Outline**

Session 1

Chapter 1 – Simeon’s Question

Chapter 2 – Jesus’ Answer

Session 2

Chapter 3 – Ephraim's Story, part 1

Chapter 4 – Brutal Realities One and Two

Session 3

Chapter 5 – Ephraim’s Story, part 2

Chapter 6 – Brutal Realities Three and Four

Session 4

Chapter 7 – What Happens Next …

Afterword

**Session 1**

**Chapter 1 – Simeon’s Question**

**Chapter 2 – Jesus’ Answer**

**Welcome:** (10 minutes)

Greet everyone and have them briefly introduce themselves. Provide a book to anyone who hasn’t received one yet. Give a general overview of the four sessions (as summarized in the Introduction of the book). Explain the format and reading schedule. Make it warm, friendly, and conversational.

Distribute session 1 handout.

**Group discussion**: (15-20 minutes)

Discuss as many of these questions as you have time for. You may want to select the order of the questions in advance based on your knowledge of the group.

1. What do you think motivated Simeon to ask his question?
2. Why didn’t the priest or Levite help the robbery victim?
3. Who are those you find yourself moving to the other side of the road to avoid? Why?

Encourage people to think about the questions in the back of the book and online at (QR code).

**Table time**: (15 minutes)

Divide into table-sized groups and appoint a moderator for each table. Rotate moderators each week. Provide paper and pens for a 10-minute writing time. Use a timing app to keep to the schedule. Say something like:

*“You are free to write whatever you want; don’t worry about how polished your words are. After the time expires, you’ll have the chance to discuss your thoughts with those at your table. Only share what you want; feel free to pass if you wish. There are no expectations, and no one’s recording what’s being shared.”*

Select one question to write about:

When it comes to your faith, are you more conservative or curious? Are you comfortable where you are, or would you like to shift more in one direction or the other? (See Mike Hamel’s story on page ?? for an example of the difference between the two.)

Has there been a time when you have been helped by a stranger who had no expectation of repayment? How did the experience change you?

When the writing time expires, let anyone who wants share what they wrote with their table. (5 minutes)

**Optional Discussion**: (30 minutes)

Bring everyone back together. Go around the group and have people share some of what they wrote. Make it clear that anyone can pass who doesn’t want to share.

**Closing**: (5-10 minutes)

Talk about one of the authors’ personal stories in these chapters, share one of your own, or ask if anyone has a story that fits the reading.

Assignment for s2: Read Chapters 3 and 4

**Session 2**

**Chapter 3 – Ephraim’s Story, part 1**

**Chapter 4 – Brutal Realities One and Two**

**Welcome:** (5 minutes)

Start on time. Open with some friendly remarks and give everyone the session 2 handout.

**Group discussion**: (15-20 minutes)

Discuss as many of these questions as you have time for. You may want to select the order of the questions in advance based on your knowledge of the group.

1. What obstacles have you encountered in your career or home life that have stopped you from growing? Is there anything you can do about them?
2. Have you had an experience where you came face to face with your mortality? If so, what was it, and how did it change you?
3. How was pain processed in your home?

Encourage people to think about the questions in the back of the book and online at (QR code).

**Table Time:** (15 minutes)

Divide into table-sized groups and appoint a moderator for each table. Rotate moderators each week. Provide paper and pens for a 10-minute writing time. Use a timing app to keep to the schedule. (10 minutes)

Select one question to write about:

In what ways in your life right now can you identify with Ephraim in his pain?

Can you identify a box you would like to bring out of the basement?

When the writing time expires, let anyone who wants share what they wrote with their table. (5 minutes)

**Optional Discussion**: (30 minutes)

Bring everyone back together. Go around the group and have people share some of what they wrote. Make it clear that anyone can pass who doesn’t want to share.

**More Group Discussion:** (10-15 minutes)

Share a time when you encountered one of these realities in a powerful way, and tell what it taught you.

Brutal Reality One: Life is hard.

Brutal Reality Two: You are going to die.

**Closing**: (5-10 minutes)

Talk about one of the authors’ personal stories in these chapters, share one of your own, or ask if anyone has a story that fits the reading.

Assignment for session 3: Read Chapters 5 and 6.

**Session 3**

**Chapter 5 – Ephraim’s Story, part 2**

**Chapter 6 – Brutal Realities Three and Four**

**Welcome:** (5 minutes)

Start on time. Open with some friendly remarks and give everyone the session 3 handout.

**Group discussion**: (15-20 minutes)

Discuss as many of these questions as you have time for. You may want to select the order of the questions in advance based on your knowledge of the group.

1. How did your upbringing and education prepare you to deal with setbacks in your life and career? What was helpful? What was lacking?
2. Which of the voices shaping your self-identity has been the most influential in your life? Why?
3. Why is it so hard to move from “I am less” thinking to “I am loved” thinking?

Encourage people to think about the questions in the back of the book and online at (QR code).

**Table Time:** (15 minutes)

Divide into table-sized groups and appoint a moderator for each table. Rotate moderators each week. Provide paper and pens for a 10-minute writing time. Use a timing app to keep to the schedule. (10 minutes)

Select one question to write about:

How do you perceive yourself, and how are other voices shaping who you think you need to be?

Personal growth occurs as we allow ourselves to be conquered by ever-greater forces (reread Rilke’s poem on page ??). What does this idea mean to you? What questions does it raise? What hope does it provide?

When the writing time expires, let anyone who wants share what they wrote with their table. (5 minutes)

**Optional Discussion**: (30 minutes)

Bring everyone back together. Go around the group and have people share some of what they wrote. Make it clear that anyone can pass who doesn’t want to share.

**More Group Discussion:** (10-15 minutes)

Share a time when you encountered one of these realities in a powerful way, and tell what it taught you.

Brutal Reality Three: The world does not revolve around you.

Brutal Reality Four: You are not in control.

**Closing**: (5-10 minutes)

Talk about one of the authors’ personal stories in these chapters, share one of your own, or ask if anyone has a story that fits the reading.

Assignment for session 4: Read Chapter 7 and the Afterword.

**Session 4**

**Chapter 7 – What Happens Next …**

**Afterword**

**Welcome:** (5 minutes)

Start on time. Open with some friendly remarks and give everyone the session 4 handout.

**Group discussion**: (15-20 minutes)

Discuss as many of these questions as you have time for. You may want to select the order of the questions in advance based on your knowledge of the group.

1. Have you ever gone out of your way to help someone who was “unclean,” as Simeon did in the Temple? What were the circumstances, and what happened as a result?
2. Should mercy and compassion be extended to everyone, even if their dire circumstances are their fault?
3. What are some things that keep us from helping people in need?

Encourage people to think about the questions in the back of the book and online at (QR code).

**Table Time:** (15 minutes)

Divide into table-sized groups and appoint a moderator for each table. Rotate moderators each week. Provide paper and pens for a 10-minute writing time. Use a timing app to keep to the schedule. (10 minutes)

Select one question to write about:

Ephraim was a Good Samaritan in his context (a merchant on the Jericho Road). Simeon became a good Samaritan in his context (a Levite in the temple). In what contexts might you become a Good Samaritan?

Jesus talked about “eternal life” in the here and now when he said, “Go and do likewise,” as demonstrated by the Good Samaritan. How does this affect your view of eternal life?

When the writing time expires, let anyone who wants share what they wrote with their table. (5 minutes)

**Optional Discussion**: (30 minutes)

Bring everyone back together. Go around the group and have people share some of what they wrote. Make it clear that anyone can pass who doesn’t want to share.

**More Group Discussion:** (10-15 minutes)

What makes “us” us and “them” them? How can we overcome this way of thinking?

*“Compassion isn't just about feeling the pain of others, it's about bringing them in toward yourself. If we love what God loves, then, in compassion, margins get erased. ‘Be compassionate as God is compassionate’ means the dismantling of barriers that exclude. . . . There is no ‘them’ and ‘us.’ There is only ‘us.’”*

* Father—Gregory Boyle

**Closing**: (5-10 minutes)

Ask people to share their biggest takeaway from this book and group study.

**HANDOUTS**

**Session 1**

**Chapter 1 – Simeon’s Question**

**Chapter 2 – Jesus’ Answer**

**Group discussion**:

Discuss as many of these questions as you have time for.

1. What do you think motivated Simeon to ask his question?
2. Why didn’t the priest or Levite help the robbery victim?
3. Who are those you find yourself moving to the other side of the road to avoid? Why?

**Table time**:

Divide into table-sized groups and appoint a moderator for each table. Rotate moderators each week. Provide paper and pens for a 10-minute writing time. Use a timing app to keep to the schedule. Say something like:

Select one question to write about:

When it comes to your faith, are you more conservative or curious? Are you comfortable where you are, or would you like to shift more in one direction or the other

Has there been a time when you have been helped by a stranger who had no expectation of repayment? How did the experience change you?

**Session 2**

**Chapter 3 – Ephraim’s Story, part 1**

**Chapter 4 – Brutal Realities One and Two**

**Group discussion**:

Discuss as many of these questions as you have time for.

1. What obstacles have you encountered in your career or home life that have stopped you from growing? Is there anything you can do about them?
2. Have you had an experience where you came face to face with your mortality? If so, what was it, and how did it change you?
3. How was pain processed in your home?

**Table Time:**

Divide into table-sized groups and appoint a moderator for each table. Rotate moderators each week. Provide paper and pens for a 10-minute writing time. Use a timing app to keep to the schedule. (10 minutes)

Select one question to write about:

In what ways in your life right now can you identify with Ephraim in his pain?

Can you identify a box you would like to bring out of the basement?

**More Group Discussion:**

Can you share a time when you encountered one of these realities in a powerful way and what you learned?

Brutal Reality One: Life is hard.

Brutal Reality Two: You are going to die.

**Session 3**

**Chapter 5 – Ephraim’s Story, part 2**

**Chapter 6 – Brutal Realities Three and Four**

**Group discussion**:

Discuss as many of these questions as you have time for.

1. How did your upbringing and education prepare you to deal with setbacks in your life and career? What was helpful? What was lacking?
2. Which of the voices shaping your self-identity has been the most influential in your life? Why?
3. Why is it so hard to move from “I am less” thinking to “I am loved” thinking?

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Personal growth occurs as we allow ourselves to be conquered by ever-greater forces (reread Rilke’s poem on page ??). What does this idea mean to you? What questions does it raise? What hope does it provide?

**More Group Discussion:**

Can you share a time when you encountered one of these realities in a powerful way and what you learned?

Brutal Reality Three: The world does not revolve around you.

Brutal Reality Four: You are not in control.

**Session 4**

**Chapter 7 – What Happens Next …**

**Afterword**

**Group discussion**:

Discuss as many of these questions as you have time for.

1. Have you ever gone out of your way to help someone who was “unclean,” as Simeon did in the Temple? What were the circumstances, and what happened as a result?
2. Should mercy and compassion be extended to everyone, even if their dire circumstances are their fault?
3. What are some things that keep us from helping people in need?

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**More Group Discussion:**

What makes “us” us and “them” them? How can we overcome this way of thinking?

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